

MR. GORHAM REPLIES TO MR. MATTERN.

To the Editor of The Open Court:

Presuming upon your willingness to give an opponent a hearing, I beg you to allow me a few lines of reply to Mr. Johannes Mattern's article in *The Open Court* for December.

To rebut the charges of German atrocities by the evidence of people who did not happen to see them is a cheap and easy way of getting rid of unpleasant accusations. Why Mr. Mattern should accept German evidence against Belgians while rejecting Belgian evidence against Germans I fail to understand. After making every possible allowance for exaggeration, falsehood, and hysteria in the atrocity stories, the balance against Germany remains terribly heavy. For what were the Germans doing in Belgium at all? Mr. Mattern looks with equanimity upon their insolent and treacherous invasion of a weak state whose integrity they were pledged to defend, and he thus assumes resistance to crime to be itself a crime. But the inhabitants of an invaded country have a natural right to resist by every means in their power, and this right has been more or less clearly recognized by all civilized nations. No nation has recognized it so explicitly as Germany. In April 1813 the *Landsturm* law was passed by Prussia as a measure of defense against the French under Napoleon. Article 1 of this law, which has never been repealed, runs thus: "Every citizen is required to oppose the invader with *all the arms* at his disposal, and to prejudice him *by all available means.*"¹ And article 39 says: "The *Landsturm* will not wear uniforms, in order that it may not be recognizable."

Is it not evident that in this war Germany is disregarding her own military laws whenever she thinks proper to do so; that in fact she has one law for herself and another for her adversaries? Germany may strike as hard as she pleases, but the enemy is a criminal if he strikes back.

Civilians who take part in war do so, of course, at their own risk, but they have a right to expect that repressive measures will be adopted with some regard to justice. No reasonable person can see any approximation to justice in wholesale destruction and slaughter because of a few random shots without the least attempt

¹ This disposes of the admissions by Belgian newspapers which a superfluous industry has collected.

to ascertain whether they were fired by civilians or soldiers, or in the various abuses of the white flag, the employment of women and children as "shields" to avert hostile fire, in the shelling of defenseless watering-places, in the torpedoing of passenger vessels, and other well-known German devices which Mr. Mattern discreetly passes over in silence.

Mr. Mattern also ignores the fact that the present-day German conception of war involves and excuses the outrages which he discredits. These outrages are so much the more reprehensible that they are part of a system; they have been committed in cold blood and by the orders of superior officers. The Kaiser's exhortations to "frightfulness," the order of General Stenger that prisoners were to be put to death, the innumerable demands of German publicists for relentless punishment of all who dare to resist Germany, cannot be supposed to have had no effect upon the German armies.

It is quite true that I attach to the Bryce report a credence which I should not give to pro-German assertions. Let it be assumed, however, that the whole of the Belgian and British evidence in the report is a malicious concoction. How does Mr. Mattern explain away the evidence of the German diaries, photographs of which are given? One of these diaries mentions three instances of German troops firing at one another. Here is an extract from the note-book of a Saxon officer: "A cyclist fell off his machine, and his rifle went off. He immediately said he had been shot at. *All the inhabitants were burnt in the houses.*" Another officer remarks: "Our men had behaved like regular Vandals." Some firing having come from a convent, all the women and children found there were shot. The writer in the one case says: "In future we shall have to hold an inquiry as to their guilt instead of shooting them." (!) Does any military law authorize such crimes?

A peculiar frame of mind appears to be revealed in Mr. Mattern's suggestion that a sentence of mine should be amended to read that the German troops left their own country provided with the means of "relentless retribution for unlawful attacks" by civilians. Not *just* retribution, be it observed, but *relentless* retribution. I do not accept the amendment, nor can I understand why the need for "retribution" should have been foreseen, except on the supposition that outrages by the troops were contemplated and encouraged. And "unlawful attacks"! Who says it was unlawful for the Belgians to defend their homes and families? Unlawful in what sense? It was no violation of mutually understood rights, but it

was (if it occurred) a violation of an unwritten military usage which has not even the sanction of German military law.

Mr. Mattern considers that a quotation from the *New Statesman* (dating prior to the publication of the Bryce report) in which a general scepticism as to atrocity stories is recommended "disposes of the myth" of certain incidents detailed in the report. It is indeed an "intelligent anticipation" which is able in January to refute statements that were published only in the following May. The *New Statesman* was, of course, right in deprecating belief in stories and rumors which had no evidence behind them, and some of which proved to be untrue. But when the matter had been investigated by a thoroughly competent and trustworthy commission, and an immense body of evidence proved that shocking excesses had been committed, the case assumed a different complexion. Mr. Mattern must know that a general warning against credulity cannot possibly "dispose of" specific charges formulated some months later. Without reflecting upon his honesty, however, I will remind him that the fact of some stories being found false is no disproof of other stories which have been found true by the evidence of eye-witnesses and by the admissions of Germans themselves. To insinuate any comparison between the incident related by Mr. Powell, in which no lives were lost, with the excesses actually admitted by the German diaries and note-books, shows that strange perversion of the reasoning faculty exhibited by so many German apologists.

Mr. Mattern's concluding sentence further illustrates his mentality. It is an implication that extreme severity in war is the speediest method of abolishing war. Experience proves the direct contrary; it proves that cruelty arouses a bitter spirit of revenge, and leads inevitably to terrible reprisals. When the Allies have it in their power they will be within their rights if they inflict upon Germany the severities which she is prompt to inflict upon others. How will the Germans like their own medicine?

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P. S. As the quotation from the *New Statesman* is somewhat misleading I add a passage from a recent issue of that paper: "Then came the horrors of Belgium—perhaps the most cold-blooded and disciplined savageries in the history of modern civilization. What made them uniquely horrible, according to the greater part of the English press, was that, so far from being the work of an undisciplined horde, they were perpetrated by a disciplined army at the command of its superior officers."